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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the literature which examines school policies currently guiding educational practice in the area of student substance abuse and discusses the relationship between special education and substance-using and substance-abusing students. Reviewed are: (1) definitions of substance abuse, which vary with the conceptualization of the problem, based on various models--moral, legal, medical, social learning, or ecological; (2) court cases which indicate that when drug or alcohol use by a special education student is related to a handicapping condition, exclusion from school does not appear to be an appropriate response; (3) studies on school performance and substance abuse, supporting the conclusion that substance-using adolescents are less committed to education and at greater risk for leaving school before graduating; (4) requirements that schools provide specialized educational services to students who abuse drugs; and (5) current responses of high schools to drug and alcohol use/abuse among students. The paper outlines reasons that schools should address the issue of policies and practices in the area of substance abuse and lists recommended steps to be taken by educators. (JDD)

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Substance Abuse, School Policy and Special Education

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Adolescent substance abuse is an issue of national concern. In recent years, parents, community groups, and state and federal governments have pressured schools to join in the detection and prevention of substance abuse in the adolescent population (Marcus et al, 1985). The focus of most schools' efforts has been on drug prevention and education. Less attention has focused on how schools should handle students who use or abuse drugs (Cohen, 1985).

Recent studies indicate that while approximately 3/4 of school districts surveyed have a written policy on student substance abuse or use (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement [OERI], 1987), much variation exists in the content of these policies (Marcus et al., 1985). For example, schools' responses to a drug-related first offense range from expulsion to referral for counseling or placement in an alternative school (Marcus et al, 1985). Educators should be aware of the elements of an effective substance abuse policies. However, they also need to understand the effect of those policies on certain student populations. Specifically, the impact of substance abuse policies on students who are addicted to drugs and students who are in special education programs raise a number of legal and educational issues. An examination of the range of policies currently guiding educational practice in this area and a discussion of the relationship between special education and substance using

and abusing students can help special educators and others deal with this serious problem.

Defining Substance Abuse

Definitions of substance abuse like those of other problem behaviors strongly reflect the perspectives of persons who define them. Definitions vary in breadth from the use of illegal drugs or drugs without a physician's prescription to the use of any chemical ". . . in spite of extreme disruption of physical well-being, psychological integrity or social functioning. . ." (Miksic, 1983, p.251). The terms substance use, addiction, and dependence are sometimes differentiated from abuse; other times they are used synonymously in school policy.

Definitions of substance abuse vary with how this problem is conceptualized or perceived. The oldest and most prevalent conceptualization is the moral model which associates drug abuse with immorality and sin (Satinder, 1980). The legal model, the modern, rational and more eclectic version of the moral model, views drug use as a crime which should be punished (Satinder, 1980). According to the legal model, tough laws against drug use can stem the problem (Guydish, cited in Thorne & DeBlassie, 1985).

A third conceptualization, the medical model, accepted widely by the medical and mental health fields, describes alcohol and drug abuse as chronic illnesses. This perspective maintains that the abuser must be treated in order to be reintegrated as a functional member of society (Satinder, 1980; Guydish, cited in

Thorne & DeBlassie, 1985). Self-help programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Chemical Dependents Anonymous are based on this model in which lay people, not physicians, provide treatment. The growing strength of the medical model in dealing with alcoholism appears to be attributable to the legal status of alcohol and increasing evidence of genetic predisposition to alcoholism (Desmond, 1987). Although the moral, legal and medical models view substance abuse quite differently, there are some interesting parallels among them. First, all three see the locus of the problem as being within the individual (Satinder, 1980). The abuser is either immoral, criminal or sick. Second, the rehabilitation of substance abusers from the perspective of these models often requires that they be sent to special facilities (prison or special treatment centers) away from the mainstream of society (Satinder, 1980). Finally, these models view substance abusers as dysfunctional members of society.

A fourth conceptualization of substance abuse includes both the social learning model and the ecological model of substance abuse (Guydish, cited in Thorne & DeBlassie, 1985; Satinder, 1980). The social learning model examines the individual's interactions with factors in her or his immediate environment (e.g., parental drug use, peer influence) that may reinforce substance abusing behaviors (Guydish, cited in Thorne & DeBlassie, 1985; Satinder, 1980). The ecological model additionally looks at the interaction of broader societal influences (e.g. societal emphasis on pills as cures, mass media

portrayal of the glamour of alcohol) that may also reinforce or encourage drug abusing behaviors (Satinder, 1980). These models view substance abuse as a learned response that occurs within the context of the individual's interactions with others and with social institutions. In order to affect change from a social learning or ecological perspective, the individual must replace the maladaptive behaviors and society must examine and change some of its responses to substance abuse.

While some educators believe that the problem of abusing adolescents lies outside the responsibilities of education and belongs to the law enforcement, mental health or medical fields, others maintain that schools are in a unique position to develop mandatory alternative programs for abusing students and are often the only resource communities can offer (Cohen, 1985). School, after the family, is viewed as a primary socializing institution. As the composition of families changes, schools are being asked to assume responsibilities that were once the purview of family and community (e.g. sex education, extended day care, and health care). To many parents, government agencies, communities and educators it seems natural to include substance abuse prevention and intervention as part of schools' responsibilities.

The extent to which school personnel should be involved in the identification or treatment of substance abusers is an unresolved issue (Cohen, 1985). However, the problems of substance abuse by students enrolled in special education programs should be a particular concern in light of recent

events. The 1988 Supreme Court decision, Honig v. Doe, affirmed the rights of disruptive special education students to educational services when their misbehavior was a manifestation of their handicapping condition. When drug or alcohol use by a special education student is related to a handicapping or disabling condition, exclusion from school no longer appears to be an appropriate response. Exclusion of substance abusing or using special education students may conform to school disciplinary codes and a sense of responding to all students in the same manner. However, in light of Honig v. Doe and a relatively recent Office of Civil Rights ruling in the Lake Washington School District No. 414 EHLR, 1985) on the eligibility of substance abusing students for individualized educational services under Section 504, the legal conceptualization of the problem and the exclusion from school is not acceptable.

Schools need to develop positive, proactive policies concerning drug and alcohol use among students. A brief review of the literature on school performance and substance abuse, a discussion of substance abuse as a potentially handicapping condition, and a review of current school policies suggest that more enlightened responses to the problem are in order.

School Performance and Substance Abuse

Several studies have found a high correlation among substance abuse, school failure and low commitment to school. Other reports identified school failure and low commitment to

school as predictors of both delinquent behavior and substance abuse (Hawkins et al, 1987).

Jessor & Jessor (1978) conducted a three-year study of student drug use in the Rocky Mountain region (n=483). They focused on drug use and personality variables such as strength of relationship and personal values and beliefs. Their analyses revealed that nonusers were more likely to value academic achievement and to expect academic success while drug users were more likely to show a lack of interest in school.

Smith & Fogg (1978) conducted a five-year study on the psychological predictors of marijuana use among high school students in Boston (n=651). They found that nonusers were more likely to value study habits and to have high grade point averages (G.P.A.'s) while users were more likely to have low G.P.A.'s.

Kandel, Kessler & Margulies (1978) examined the relationship of student drug use to parental use of drugs (including prescription), friends' use of drugs and, students' personal values and lifestyle for high school students in New York State (n=5,423). The study did not identify a clear relationship of drug use to school performance, number of classes cut or absenteeism. However, Kandel et al (1978) note that their sample did not survey students who dropped out or were absent at the time of the survey. Bias may exist in all three of these studies as all subjects were volunteers, predominantly white and

middle-class and that sample attrition occurred between testing points.

Studies by Anhalt & Klein (1976) and Friedman, Glickman & Utanda (1987) support the results of these longitudinal studies. Anhalt & Klein (1976) surveyed 3,807 eighth and ninth graders in 5 school districts in Nassau County, New York on their drug use, family relationships, personal problems and academic performance. They found that illegal drug use highly correlated with low academic achievement, family conflict and personal problems.

In a similar study, Friedman, Glickman & Utada (1987) compared the school drop out rate among adolescent non-users, occasional or casual drug users and regular drug users in two Philadelphia high schools. This well-designed study found a significant relationship between the drop out rate and the degree of student substance use. Twenty six percent of the non-users and 30% of the casual users dropped out compared to the 51% of the regular users. The study also found that students who did not like school were more likely to be involved with drugs. Friedman et al (1987) note that the temporal relationship between school problems and drugs remains unclear. Drug use and school drop-out could in fact be "concomitant" effects to a ". . . more basic state of dissatisfaction." (Friedman et al, 1987, p.363).

The annual National Trends in Drug Use (Johnston, O'Malley & Bachman, 1987) indicates that among high school seniors the use of some drugs such as marijuana and illicit prescription medications has declined. However, the use of alcohol and other

drugs remains relatively high. While the National Trends data provides useful information on high school students in the aggregate, it does not include students who dropped out of high school prior to their senior year nor does it examine drug use among students enrolled in special education programs (Johnston et al, 1987). The U.S Department of Health and Human Services 2nd Triennial Report (1987) found that there appears to be a higher prevalence of drug use among drop-outs than among graduating students. The differences between students who dropped out and students who graduated may be even more dramatic than the survey data indicate. Overall, these studies support the conclusion that substance using adolescents are less committed to education and at greater risk for leaving school before graduating.

Substance Abuse as a Handicapping Condition

While higher school failure and drop-out rates among substance abusing students may concern some educators, schools are not currently required to provide specialized educational services to students who abuse drugs. However, the present trend towards the medical conceptualization of drug and alcohol addiction may have a profound effect on the field of education, especially special education. In concurrence with the fact that drug and alcohol abuse or dependency are not considered handicapping conditions under P.L. 94-142, the Office of Special Education Programs of the U.S. Department of Education (formerly the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped) replied to a 1979

inquiry that chemical dependency did not meet the definition of handicapped under the "other health impaired" category because it did not result from injury or disease (EHLR, 1979). However, in a 1985 ruling, the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (OCR) found that a Washington State school system illegally denied Jorn Aronson, a drug addicted student, a "free and appropriate" education under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act because the school failed to evaluate him as a handicapped student when he returned from treatment (EHLR, 1985). According to the OCR, this student's addiction was within the Section 504's definition of a handicapping "physical or mental impairment." (EHLR, 1985).

In a similar situation in Illinois, a State Appeals panel upheld a local hearing officers' decision and required a local school district to provide comprehensive special education services to an adolescent with a history of behavior disorders and drug abuse. The student after returning from a residential drug treatment facility, had been placed in a regular education class and the local school district had not responded to the parents' requests for increased services. The school district argued unsuccessfully that the student's educational problems were a result of dysfunction within the family and substance abuse and were not a special education concern (EHLR, 1985-86).

In addition to the OCR ruling and the Appeals Panel decision, the literature on adolescents with behavioral and emotional problems and preliminary results from an adolescent

survey conducted at the University of Maryland suggests that students identified as "seriously emotionally disturbed" and enrolled in segregated day and residential programs may be at greater risk for substance abuse (See related article in this issue).

Substance Abuse and School Policies

The studies and opinions discussed above suggest a positive relationship between academic difficulties and substance abuse provide preliminary support to the notion that schools may have to educate students with serious substance abuse problems in the future (Kilbourne, 1985). This next portion of the literature review will examine how high schools presently respond to drug and alcohol use and abuse among students.

Schools began to develop substance abuse policies in the late 1960s, mainly in response to crisis situations such as overdose and drug trafficking (Marcus et al, 1985). Over time, the policies became more complicated as administrators had to take into account state and federal laws regarding drug use and sales, mandated drug education, and due process procedures (i.e., informing law enforcement authorities, search and seizure, confidentiality, and school responsibility toward substance using students) (Marcus et al, 1985).

Department of Education Survey

Though most literature on substance abuse and the schools has focused mainly on prevention and education (Cohen, 1985), some research has focused on the content and success of school

policies. A U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) (1987) "Fast Response" survey on substance abuse education was administered in 15,300 U.S. school districts. Included were questions on the existence and content of the districts' drug policies. The survey found that 73% of districts had a written substance abuse policy while 17% were planning or considering one. Only 10% saw no need for a substance abuse policy (U.S. Department of Education, OERI, 1987).

In analyzing the content of these policies the survey found that when a student committed an infraction under the substance abuse policy: 92% of districts would notify the police; 99% would notify the parents; 95% would suspend the student; 75% would expel the student; 83% would refer the student for clinical assessment; 95% would require counseling; and 49% would place the student in an alternate school setting (U.S. Department of Education, OERI, 1987). By the authors' admission, this brief and general survey did not request that the school districts explain key concepts such as "counseling" or "notifying the police." Nor did it discuss the number or ordering of responses within the policy. The 75% expulsion rate, for example, could mean that 75% expel students for first offense or that schools use expulsion for repeat offenders. However, the survey does suggest that school districts view substance abuse primarily as a discipline problem.

National Institute on Drug Abuse Survey

In a comparative study of school drug policies prepared for the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) Marcus et al (1985) found that school policies ranged from law enforcement procedures to prevention programming and that almost all policies required due process procedures, notification of police and parents and regard for student confidentiality. Marcus et al, (1985) described effective policies as having some or all of the following characteristics: (a) co-existed with strong drug education program, (b) involved full community and student input in their development, (c) emphasized the school's role as well as the police in enforcing drug laws, (d) trained staff for policy implementation, (e) applied policy to all school personnel as well as to students, (f) included alternatives to punishment for drug related offenses and problems, (g) developed school pride and interest, (h) had a multicultural perspective and, (i) had strong administrative support. Effective policies also targeted all three groups involved with substance use: those who did not use (or had not yet tried); those who used or abused; and those who were involved with users (i.e, friends, teachers) (Marcus et al, 1985). Characteristics of ineffective policies included: (a) unrealistic expectations, (b) lack of adequate accommodations of legal issues, (c) sole or over reliance on punishment and, (d) had no training for teachers, parents and administrators (Marcus et al, 1985). A caveat of this study is that the informal, unpublished document intended to recommend

policy guidelines fails to provide descriptions of the sample and methodology.

The purpose of this brief policy review was to examine issues associated with schools' response to the education and treatment of substance abusing students and to discuss current practices in this area. Educators need to address this issue for several reasons. First, schools have been pressured by parents, the federal and state governments and communities to prevent students from using drugs. Part of successful prevention requires dealing effectively with students who have substance abuse problems (Marcus et al, 1985). Second, several studies have suggested that students who abuse demonstrate lower academic motivation and expectations and higher school failure and drop-out rates than non-abusers. Third, a recent ruling by the OCR on John Aronson suggests that schools may be required to educate students with substance abuse problems under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. The ruling also suggests that the Department of Education may be moving toward the medical model view of substance abuse as an illness or impairment (Kilbourne, 1985). If this is the case, special educators may find substance abusing students in their classes in the future. The review of school substance abuse policies revealed that schools view substance abuse as predominantly a discipline issue (Marcus et al, 1985; U.S. Department of Education, OERI, 1987). Repeat offenders, students with drug abuse problems, are most likely

referred out of the education system and into the medical and criminal justice systems.

Recommendations

Based on what we know about current school policies, the academic problems of drug-abusing students, and the emerging legal issues related to special education students with drug and alcohol problems, a number of steps can be taken. Specifically, educators need to:

- 1) Examine current substance abuse policies. Do they contain elements of an effective policy? Are there alternatives to suspension and expulsion for handicapped students who violate the policy?
- 2) Establish or strengthen links between schools and juvenile services, mental health and chemical dependency treatment agencies concerning student drug use. Such inter-agency communication provides schools with information about students' use outside school, places to refer students for treatment and eases the students' transition back to school after treatment. This could involve school and agency liaisons or the establishment of inter-agency alternative education and therapeutic programs.
- 3) Be prepared to evaluate the students' educational needs and provide appropriate services when students return from treatment. However, schools should also recognize that problems associated with drug and alcohol abuse do not mean unilateral inclusion in or exclusion from special education programs.

4) Understand the link between poor school performance, low commitment to school and substance abuse. The threat of disciplinary action for drug related offenses may not be an effective deterrent for many students who are casual or frequent drug users. Schools need to review their curriculum and general school environment to ensure that options are available to help engage all students in learning. Failure to do so will perpetuate a system in which students with serious problems drop out or are expelled prior to graduation.

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